

People's Reporter

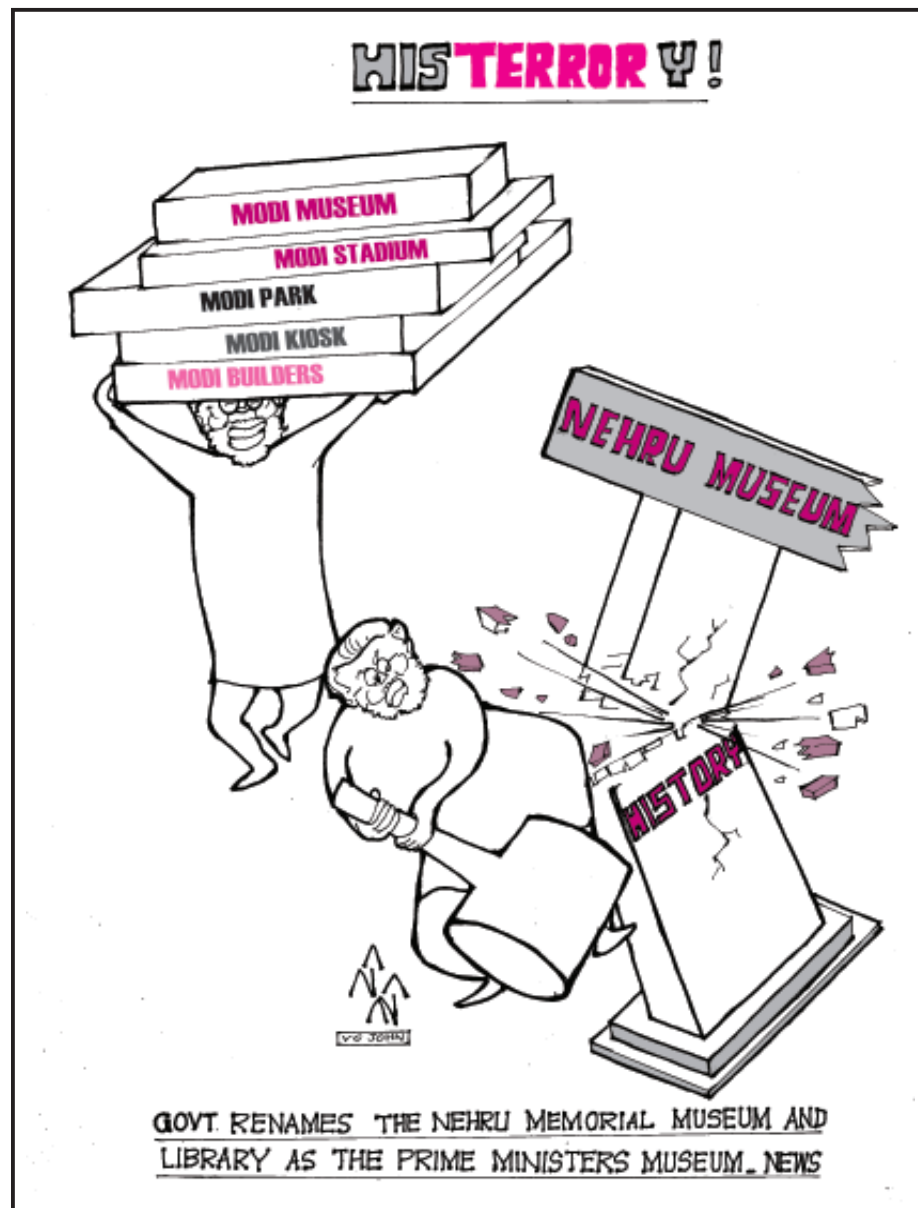
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World Council
of Churches

At a memorial service in Nairobi, tributes pour in for the late Dr. Agnes Abuom

Amidst a global outpouring of tributes and condolences at a memorial service, Canon Dr. Agnes Regina Murei Abuom was celebrated as a bold Christian, peacemaker, and resolute ecumenist.

In Nairobi, on 13 June, a sombre mood hung at the Anglican All Saints' Cathedral as the remains of Abuom were wheeled into the church. On the pews sat, among others, theologians, religious scholars, global ecumenists, and humanitarian officials who were paying their final respects.

"I will really miss you but I choose to celebrate you, the lessons, and life skills you have passed on to me," said Tabitha Chepkwony, her daughter, in a tribute. "One thing that will forever stand out to me and I intend to uphold it all my life is, even on your death bed, you still praised God and thanked Him for his goodness in your life. Your life is a testimony, Mama."

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World Communion
of Reformed Churches

GRAPE campaigns come into focus

GRAPE (Global Reformed Advocacy Platforms for Engagement) is a WCRC project that seeks to address the enormity and complexity of the unjust economic situation coupled with the climate crisis, by growing networks of advocates in church and civil society.

The two pilot projects of the GRAPE (Global Reformed Advocacy Platforms for Engagement) programme of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) took firmer shape at a meeting in South Africa.

On Thursday, 25 May, at 8:30 a.m., the GRAPE participants from Kenya and South Africa found themselves meeting in a dark and chilly conference room in Johannesburg. The lights had just gone out because South Africa has an electricity crisis; load shedding a regular occurrence, which often means no electricity for eight to ten hours a day.

The conference centre had a diesel generator and gas heaters, albeit expensive and not always reliable solution, for a systemic crisis. Until the diesel generator started working, those gathered had an inspiring and warming morning devotion about the theology from the margins with lively songs which warmed their bodies and stimulated their minds.

This was symbolic of the GRAPE programme, which seeks to find practical solutions based on the engagement of churches and partners for the systemic problems of social and economic injustice



GRAPE meeting in Johannesburg

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and the effects of climate breakdown.

The GRAPE Steering Committee along with WCRC Executive Secretaries Muna Nassar and Hanns Lessing, EPRI course convenors Claudia and Dirk Haarmann, and South African and Kenyan church leaders had come together for two days to evaluate the progress of the GRAPE programme.

Over the last six months, the GRAPE teams in Kenya and South Africa had, with the support of the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI), developed advocacy campaigns for the two countries. They shared these details to both the WCRC Executive Committee, and to each other, including analyses of the current situation in the countries and their foci and plans for their advocacy campaigns.

In Kenya, given the dramatic drought and dire water situation caused by the climate crisis, the team wants to work with their government and various national and global stakeholders to ensure that by 2028

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The Bloodbath in Manipur

For a long time after the infamous 'Naga-Kuki' clash of the 1990, Manipur has been a zone of comparative peace. However, the sudden eruption of ethnic clashes on 3 May, that took away over 100 lives, displaced nearly 35000 people and destroyed many churches, turned this State into a theatre of unending riots and ethnic violence. The visit of the Union Home Minister Mr. Amit Shaw to Imphal, in the first week of June, the appointment of a Judicial Panel to probe the violence and of a Peace Committee, and deployment of paramilitary forces in the region created the hope that the violence would come to an end and peace would be established. But, the outbreak of clashes and arson for the third time on 14 and 15 June, that took away 10 more lives, made this hope short-lived.

The ethnic rivalry and the feeling of sub-nationalism have been historical problems in the North-Eastern States. Meiteis consisting of 53 % of the people living in the plains covering only 10% of the land; and Kukis consisting of 41% of the people living in the hills with nearly 90% of the land are the two major ethnic groups in Manipur. Kukis categorised as 'hill tribes' by the colonial rulers got recognised as Scheduled Tribes (ST) after independence. As a result, they have been enjoying the right to reserved forests; and the Meiteis were denied the right to own and possess land in the hills. Therefore, along with ethnic rivalry, the right to land has been an additional cause for the conflicts between these groups.

Under this scenario, Meiteis have been demanding ST status to them for getting the right to land in the hills, and Kukis have been opposing this demand. Recently, the BJP government in Manipur passed the Land Act permitting Meiteis to own land in the hills. Hundreds of Kukis were evicted from reserve forests with no rehabilitation. This triggered anger and discontentment among the Kukis. There are 40 Meitei MLAs and 20 Tribal MLAs. Although 10 Tribal MLAs belonging to Kukis support the coalition under BJP, they failed to resist the Land Act and the passing of the budget in the Assembly allocating 90% of the resources to the Meiteis in the valley. It was when the resulting discontentment among the Kukis was boiling, an order of the Manipur High Court, on 27 March 2023, directed the State government to recommend the S.T. status to Meiteis. The new Land Act and the Court order favouring the Meiteis infuriated the Kukis. This is the immediate reason for the outbreak of the clashes between these groups.

The ethnic rivalry and the political clout of the Meiteis under the BJP-rule further got aggravated by the religious division among them also. While the Meiteis are Vaishnava Hindus, Kukis are largely Christians. The Kukis blame the State government for the troubles and raise demands for the dismissal of the State government and the formation of a separate administration for the region inhabited by them as a prelude to a separate state. Therefore, the hope about solving the Meitei - Kuki conflict, with cultural and historical roots, now got worse owing to new issues of communal politics and land ownership, through military and administrative measures, appears to be unrealistic.

It is unfortunate that the good results produced with the efforts of the Central and State governments for the last 75 years, to dissipate the ethnic and sub-national divides in the North-East and for integration of this region with the nation, have got lost with the fresh violence in Manipur. Let us hope that wisdom would prevail at the Centres of politics and administration, to establish justice and lasting peace in that region.

Thought for the Fortnight

"When you stop chasing the wrong things, you give the right things a chance to catch you."

— Lolly Daskal

Creator & the Heavenly Throne: Rev. 4.1-11

Is Creator God De-throned?

R. Daniel Premkumar

The problem with today's believers is, they are willing to worship God the Creator but are unwilling to cast their crowns before the throne, for they like to play God.

This very attitude has brought us to the present climate crisis and the survival of the planet to the brink of disaster.

John the Divine has a peep into the Heavenly scene in which God is seated upon his throne. We recall that the Book of Revelation was written when the Roman persecution was at its peak and all the Roman subjects were forced to know who was seated upon the throne. John the Divine had to "Climb up" to the glorious heaven to witness heavenly activity.

But, the writer of the Fourth Gospel describes the coming down of the Eternal Word and sharing our flesh and blood and pitching his tent down below in the neighbourhood. Like today's political narrative - '**double engine ka sarkar**' - we need both these visions to correct our faith and witness.

In the words of Tom Wright 'God was kicked upstairs so that we can do whatever here down below!'. This is not the what the Biblical witness teaches us from Creation on to Exodus, followed by the Promised Land, followed by the Judges and the Prophets. Then we have also portions of the Scripture like in Rev. 4, that speak about the heavenly glory and heavenly beings.

Unlike the imperial throne, God of the Bible shares his authority with humans over the entire created order. Verse 4 states that there were 24 thrones and elders with golden crowns around the throne of the creator. This authority over creation is that of a Father Mentoring and Nursing the Children not like the imperial throne. Today, there are a few Totalitarian Governments in the World as well as humans as a whole have taken over the authority and the rule of imperial force over the Planet's Resources with the slogan- 'eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow or the generation to come, is not in our dictionary'.

We realise that the writer of the book was using a language that belonged to a particular kind of literature that employs heavenly beings 'angels' and thunder and lightning. Even so, it is very symbolic to portray



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strange beings like the one referred to in V.8, are closer to the throne than 24 Elders. **In Gen.2, we have God creating humans with soil and creating other living beings also with mud sending out a powerful message that humans are not the crown of creation to do what they like with the rest of creation but are part and parcel of the web of life.** Thus, the entire Bible employs templates of creation, entities like living organisms and earthly components to express praise, blessing and judgement. That's why we have instances where the plant, the storm, the sea, the fish, listen to, and obey, the commands of Jesus.

It is interesting to see the 24 Elders not only fall down before the throne and worship the Creator but also they also cast their crowns before the throne. The problem with today's believers is, they are willing to worship God the Creator but are unwilling to cast their crowns before the throne, for they like to play God. This very attitude has brought us to the present climate crisis and the survival of the planet to the brink of disaster.

The ultimate purpose of creating the planet and all it contains, according to the book of Revelation, is found in V.11-

"Worthy are you, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honour and power; for you created all things, and because of your will they existed and were created."

This verse needs explanation. Worthy are you O God! Because you created all things and because of your **will** (Gk. thelema) means **preferred will** of the Creator. It is the same **will** that Paul talks about in Rom 12.2- '*that we are transformed by renewing of mind so that, we may prove what is good and perfect will of God is.*' The **Lord's Prayer** also teaches us to pray that God's **will** may come upon earth as it in Heaven.

The entire created order which includes countless number of living entities, was created because of God's **preferred will**, that's why, each of this living creatures has the stamp of God's **will** and cannot be taken as expendable or worthless by '**Higher Creatures**' called humans (by CS Lewis,

Mere Christianity). That's why Jesus talks: 'Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your father's care (**Will**)'

According to Rev 4.11, not only each of these living entities carries Creator's preferred **will** but also '*they also existed*' (V.11) sharing in the divine identity of the Creator God- '**I am who I am**' (Gk. **egw eimi**). This is an amazing truth that we learn from the Book of Revelation. Never realised that Creator God has posited divine identity and worth even on the smallest creature like a sparrow. This positing of divine will and worth, is on a creature, in our estimate insignificant and not highly prized.

In the recent past, humans were instrumental in extermination of innumerable species from the face of the earth, for ever. Hence, preserving bio-diversity is not some environmental compulsion but a dictat from the Holy Scriptures. This view of created realm is too lofty and sublime for human eyes and imagination. Even after having such a sacred Book as Holy Scriptures, if the Church fails to uphold the integrity of Creation, we are, of all people, the most pitied!

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M. M. Thomas Birth Anniversary Lecture - 3

The Role of Christians in a Democratic, Pluralistic and Multicultural Indian Society

Solomon Victus

(Third part of the paper, presented at the 'M. M. Thomas Birth Anniversary Celebrations' organized by the Tiruvalla Sangam at Pennamma Bhavanam, Tiruvalla, on 13th May 2023)

Alliances of monarchy, monoculture, monotheism and imperialism:

Apart from Biblical discussions we need to see commonalities and relations between the issues of monarchy, imperialism and monotheism. The almighty 'God', in general, is understood as dominant over the other 'gods' or deities, and some sort of superiority has been established over the so-called inferior ones. The claims of 'absolute truth' are pregnant with the tendency to be aggressive, oppressive, overriding and overpowering. In many contexts monotheism has the potentiality of inducing cultural imperialism. Thus one can easily trace in past history that there are convenient marriages between monarchical and imperial tendencies with monotheism.

The imperialism of biblical times is also no exception to the idea of monotheism to axial thought. Anand Veeraraj explains that ethnic cults were in large measure tied to their bio-regions and an agrarian and pastoral ethos. But these were of no avail in an imperial context. Imperial powers rushed to fill the vacuum with their own brand of cults – the personality cults. Every power – from Pharaoh to Caesar – instituted himself as a quasi-divine object of reverence. But the imperial cults did little to change the inner disposition of the people. The folly of these cults galvanized displaced peoples' commitment to their own national cults. National and ethnic deities were now cast as gods of the universe and all peoples. Like the sovereign, the supreme deity, Yahweh, a deity of the herding Hebrew tribe, was now seated on a throne surrounded by hosts of heaven. The prophet Isaiah's vision of Yahweh reflects the imperial designs of the Babylonians and the Assyrians (Isa. chap. 6). Axial cults ultimately filled the void left by nature and national deities. Axial prophets and philosophers were sold on imperial and urban ideologies and ways of life. They took advantage of the imperial

'Monarchy is prone to tyranny,' John Calvin writes. With the help of the doctrine of monotheism, history proved, the monarchy reached its height in destroying the freedom of the people, and exploitation of resources. Therefore, political structures of later stages were slowly opted out by the people, from monarchy to democracy, out of great struggles and sacrifices.

contexts to spread their message and mission.¹³

The problems within monotheism correspond equally with monarchy too. It is in no way different in the history of Christianity how monarchic and imperialist tendencies continuously led the people to suffer and struggle for the liberation. There is no need of introduction to say how the power struggle between monarchy and monotheistic religious heads led to many wars and colonial invasions. 'Monarchy is prone to tyranny,' John Calvin writes.¹⁴ With the help of the doctrine of monotheism, history proved, the monarchy reached its height in destroying the freedom of the people and exploitation of resources. Therefore, political structures of later stages were slowly opted out by the people from monarchy to democracy out of great struggles and sacrifices. Latin America had a society with a patriarchal structure and so Leonardo Boff feels that it is also a form of monotheism (just one God), which makes its appearance in monarchic and non-Trinitarian terms opposed to the idea of communism.¹⁵ This is a dangerous cultural phenomenon everywhere, and so one has to be very careful in dealing with the monarchic and autocratic tendencies which creep into modern institutions in a nuanced way.

Pluralistic elements within the Worship of El and Baal: Originally there were national gods like Ba'als in Canaan with a wider authority which exercised supreme control over their own



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land and their worshippers.¹⁶ But for Hebrews, Yahweh was their national God, though S/He still dwelt in Sinai or Horeb. S/He had served them well, led them through wilderness, brought them into the land, given them direction when they needed it, fought their battles for them. But S/He was essentially an El, a wilderness god, and they had no experience of Her/His ability to handle the new problems with which they were faced. They were now undertaking gradually the operations of agriculture. There was doubt whether the mountain God knew how to grow corn and cultivate vines and olives. Even at the time of Hosea there were men in Israel who did not know that it was Yahweh who supplied them with the produce of the soil (Hosea 2:5, 8).¹⁷

Oesterly and his friend believe that only after the establishment of the monarchy in Israel it was proved in a certain sense to be the victory of Yahweh.

Oesterly and his friend believe that only after the establishment of the monarchy in Israel, it was proved in a certain sense to be the victory of Yahweh. The nation now recognized definitely, S/He was the supreme God. S/He was no longer a mountain-God with Her/His home in the far south but S/He dwelt in Palestine. With this exalted conception of the unity and all-power of God, it followed that Deutero-Isaiah could not be content with the restrictive idea of Yahweh as a national God. They extended the concept further, and later they held that Yahweh was the Lord of the physical universe, the Lord of all human history, the Lord of universal morality. The final conclusion of such doctrine could be nothing but an absolute monotheism.

The nation now recognized definitely S/He was the supreme God. S/He was no longer a mountain-God with Her/His home in the far south but S/He dwelt in Palestine.¹⁸ With this exalted conception of the unity and all-power of God it followed that Deutero-Isaiah could not be content with the restrictive idea of Yahweh as a national God.¹⁹ They extended the concept further, and later they held that Yahweh was the Lord of the physical universe, the Lord of all human history, the Lord of universal morality. The final conclusion of such doctrine could be nothing but an absolute monotheism.²⁰

In spite of all such monotheistic claims, Biblical scholars like Bastiaan Wielenga still explores to what extent pluralistic elements are prevalent even within the monotheistic Hebrew traditions. 'The Canaanite word for god, El, appears in the name of Israel and Bethel and many other instances. In the calling of Moses we hear how God identifies himself as the God (El) of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob. But interestingly, the Hebrew Bible prefers the plural "Elohim" which can mean "gods" but which stands for "God" (singular) if used for Yahweh, whose proper name is usually, translated as "LORD"... This is of great significance for inter-faith dialogue. The Lord is one, but he is not alone, he is not one-sided. As the one he is fullness, encompassing all that is truly divine.'²¹

Then Bas explains why the Hebrew God was jealous of other gods. 'In the Bible we find not only rejection of the worship of other gods as idolatry, eventually with the transfer of some attributes to the God of Israel's faith. A striking feature of many texts in the Bible is that they presuppose the existence of other gods. The first commandment does not deny that there are other gods; it only forbids Israel to worship them. Jefta (Judg. 11:24) and Naomi (Ruth 1:15f.) take the existence of the gods of Ammon and Moab for granted. The very expression of God being "Jealous" (Ex. 20:5; 34:14) implies that Israel's God is, as it were, competing with others for the love of his people. But this also implies – which is often overlooked – that at this point Israel's God does not expect the worship of other nations. His anger is directed against his own people for abandoning him, respectively against others for doing injustice to his people. It is the other side of God's zeal for justice and peace. The presupposition of the covenantal love relation between God and Israel also explains why the worship of other gods is often compared with adultery and fornication.'²² However one can see how the tension between polytheism and monotheism within the Hebrew traditions is not thrashed completely out of the Bible, but the meaning may differ according to the context.²³

Footnotes

¹³ Anand Veeraraj, *Green History of Religion*, Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2006, p. 201.

¹⁴ Villa-Vicencio, Charles, *Between Christ and Caesar: Classic and Contemporary Texts on Church and State*, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986, P. 56.

¹⁵ Leonardo Boff, *Ecology & Liberation: A New Paradigm*, N.Y., Orbis, 1995, p. 25.

¹⁶ Oesterley, W.O.E. & Theodore H. Robinson, *Hebrew Religion: Its Origin and Development*, London: SPCK, 1952, p. 190.

¹⁷ I bid. p. 192.

¹⁸ I bid. p. 195.

¹⁹ I bid. p. 302.

²⁰ I bid, p. 329.

²¹ Bastiaan Wielenga, "The God of Israel and the other Deities: Why So Particular?" in *Biblical Insights on Inter-faith Dialogue*, Israel Selvanayagam (Ed), Bangalore: BTTBPSA, 1995, p. 56.

²² Bastiaan Wielenga, "The God of Israel and the other Deities: Why So Particular?" p. 54-55.

²³ For more discussions ref. Solomon Victus, "Monotheism, Monarchy, Monoculture", *Asia Journal of Theology*, Bangalore: BTESSC / SATHRI, Vol. 24, No. 2, Oct. 2010, p. 179-196.



To FOLLOW is not a FOOL's LAW. It is FULL LOVE!

To be continued

In the next issue

Urging Changes in Churches

The Goodness of Creation - 8

Do not deny justice to Animals

Mathew Koshy Punnackadu

Wildlife-human conflict occurs in various parts of the world where human populations and wildlife habitats overlap. Such conflicts are common in India, Kenya, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. When any species goes beyond its habitat and becomes troublesome to another species, it would threaten the ecosystem and may upset the rhythm of nature.

Recently in Kerala state, wild animals like elephants, tigers and wolves have been roaming the plains and attacking humans and domestic animals. Let us study the case from the viewpoint of animals. Every species has a right to live in its habitat. Denying that right is a justice issue. Media has never stated why these animals are coming to the plains.

Once, an environmentalist asked a question to the students. Which is longer, a Monkey or its tail? Some students said Monkey, and others said Tail. The environmentalist said it was a wrong question as the Monkey's tail is a part of the monkey. Again, he asked another question—which is more important human beings or nature? All the students said, human beings. The environmentalist said that the question itself was wrong. Human beings are a part of nature; separating human beings from nature is the wrong way of analysis.

While addressing school students, I usually begin the class by raising their curiosity or asking about their life-ambitions. In one of the classes, I asked the students about their aims in life. They answered: to become - Doctor, engineer, advocate, Chartered accountant... etc. One boy said he wanted to become a veterinary doctor. It was the first time I heard such an answer. Curiosity, I approached him and asked why he wanted to become a veterinary doctor. He replied that Animals would take any medicine the doctor gives without arguing — more than that, the animals won't file a case in court against the doctor!

The first incident negates the concept that humans are superior to other species. The second incident shows our attitude to animals. Both incidents are related to the mindset of human beings. **We must accept that we are one of God's creations and that the presence of all animals and plants is necessary for our survival.**

The vision of shalom is prominently found in the Hebrew prophets, such as Isaiah. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD (Isaiah 65:25). "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion.... together; and a little child will lead them." (Isaiah 11:6) This verse is part of a prophecy that speaks of a future time of peace and harmony, where even predatory animals will coexist peacefully.

The pertinent question is how we can explain the goodness of the creation when the wildlife - human being conflict is increasing daily. Why are we hearing about the frequent wildlife - Human conflicts recently? The forests are the habitat of wild animals. The habitat of wild animals is being destroyed by encroachment or Climate Change. When we construct a resort or house in the middle of the habitat of wild animals, we should naturally expect their protest. Massive deforestation makes wild animals refugees. If the wild animals had enough food in the forests, they would have remained there. Anthropocentric activities in animals' habitats provoke wild animals to attack human beings. When any species encroaches on another species' habitat/ territory, it will upset the harmony in the ecosystem. Usually, wild animals are not interested in attacking other species except for food, which upsets the rhythm of the forest.

That is why the Bible says, "But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you, or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you". (Job 12:7-10). **Human beings can study and learn several good qualities from animals. Here are a few examples:**

Diligence: As mentioned in Proverbs 6:6-8, Ants are known for their diligent work ethics. Observing their industriousness can inspire humans to be active and hardworking.

Trust and Dependency: As mentioned in Matthew 6:26, Birds rely on God's provision for their needs. Humans can learn from birds to trust in God's care and provision and develop a



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sense of dependency on a higher power.

Loyalty: Dogs are often known for their loyalty to their owners. They demonstrate unwavering devotion and love. Humans can learn from dogs to be loyal and faithful in their relationships.

Contentment: Many animals, such as squirrels or birds, exhibit contentment with the resources they have. Observing their simplicity and lack of greed, can teach humans to be content with what they have and appreciate the present moment.

Adaptability: Various animals, such as camels or penguins, can adapt to different environments and survive in challenging conditions. Humans can learn from their adaptability and develop resilience and flexibility in adversity. By studying their behaviour, anatomy, and survival strategies, humans can gain insights into adaptation, resilience, and strategies for survival in challenging conditions.

Community and

Cooperation: Bees and ants are known for their intricate social structures and cooperation within their colonies. Humans can learn from their sense of community and collaboration, promoting teamwork and unity.

These are just a few examples of the positive qualities that animals can exhibit, which can serve as valuable lessons for human beings. By observing and reflecting on the natural world, we can gain insights and inspiration to cultivate virtues in our own lives.

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." (Matthew 10:16). In this verse, Jesus instructs His disciples as He sends them out to preach the gospel. The analogy of being wise as serpents suggests the need for discernment, prudence, and resourcefulness while navigating challenging or dangerous situations. The snakes foresee the enemy and avoid them. It won't come and attack human beings. Cobra raises its hood out of fear when it confronts human beings. The verse's message is, if you encounter an enemy, be wise as serpents to avoid confrontation. Proverbs 14:16 states, "The wise are cautious and avoid danger; fools plunge ahead with reckless confidence." This verse advises against engaging in unnecessary conflict and encourages individuals to use their intelligence and discernment to avoid confrontations that may be futile or detrimental.

A professor at CMS College, Kottayam, Kerala, cared for snakes in his house. Without fear, he handles the snakes to convey the message that 95% of

snakes are non-poisonous, and they bite humans out of fear. Lawrence Anthony, an environmentalist in South Africa, died on 7 March 2012. He loved elephants. Two days after his death, the wild elephants were at his home, led by two large herds. Separate wild herds arrived in droves to say goodbye to their beloved 'man-friend,' Lawrence Anthony. 31 elephants had patiently walked over 12 miles to his South African House. Witnessing this spectacle, humans were obviously in awe not only because of the supreme intelligence and precise timing that these elephants sensed about Lawrence's passing away but also because of the profound memory and emotion the beloved animals evoked in such an organised way: Walking slowly, for days, making their way in a solemn one-by-one queue from their habitat to his house!

When they are comfortable in their habitat in forests, wild animals never attack humans. The human-wildlife conflict can be reduced if authorities can prevent encroachments to the forest area.

In the Hebrew Bible, Shalom is derived from the root word shalom, which means "to be complete" or "to be whole." It encompasses a sense of flourishing, prosperity, and righteousness from the right relationship with God, oneself, others, and creation. The vision of shalom is prominently found in the Hebrew prophets, such as Isaiah. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD (Isaiah 65:25). "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion together; and a little child will lead them." (Isaiah 11:6). This verse is part of a prophecy that speaks of a future time of peace and harmony, where even predatory animals will coexist peacefully.

The concept of Shalom in the Bible encompasses far more than the conventional understanding of peace. It represents a holistic vision of well-being, justice, harmony, and the restoration of all things following God's plan. When all species live comfortably in their habitat, we can experience shalom. When a species denies the rights of other species, it is a denial of justice.

Massive deforestation makes wild animals refugees. If the wild animals had enough food in the forests, they would have remained there. Anthropocentric activities in animals' habitats provoke wild animals to attack human beings. When any species encroaches on another species' habitat/ territory, it will upset the harmony in the ecosystem. Usually, wild animals are not interested in attacking other species, which upsets the rhythm of the forest, except for food. That is why the Bible says, "But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you, or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you". (Job 12:7-10). Human beings can study and learn several good qualities from animals.

International Economic Scene

The Global Polycrisis as a Case for Reformed Multilateralism

V. Mathew Kurian

I. Introduction

The world is presently in a grave crisis. The critical aspect of this crisis is that it is 'multidimensional'. In order to comprehend this complex situation, social scientists and philosophers prefer to use the term 'global polycrisis'.

In this article, first we introduce the concept of 'global polycrisis'. On this basis, we analyze the current global situation. Finally, we advocate reforming the existing multilateral arrangements to overcome the riddle of global polycrisis.

II. The concept of global polycrisis

According to Scott Janzwood and Thomas-Homer-Dixon of Cascade Institute, global polycrisis is any combination of multiple interacting systemic risks with the potential to cause a cascading runaway failure of Earth's natural and social systems, that irreversibly and catastrophically degrades humanity's prospects.

A systemic risk is a threat emerging within one natural, technological or social system with impacts extending beyond that system to endanger the functionality of one or more other systems.

A global polycrisis, should it occur, will inherit the four core properties of systemic risks - extreme complexity, high nonlinearity, transboundary causality and deep uncertainty - while also exhibiting causal synchronization among risks.

The credit for coining the term 'polycrisis', first goes to French philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin. The 1999 book 'Homeland Earth- A Manifesto for a New Millennium' by Morin and his co-author Anne Brigitte Kern gives a fair account of 'global polycrisis'. These authors wrote of "interwoven and overlapping crisis" affecting humanity and argued that the most "vital" problem of the day was not any single threat but the "complex intersolidarity of problems, antagonisms, crises, uncontrollable processes and the general crisis of the planet"- a phenomenon they labeled the polycrisis.

Following Morin and Kern, in 2013, Mark Swilling, a South African sociologist defined a polycrisis as "a nested set of globally interactive socio-economic, ecological and cultural-institutional crises that defy reduction to a single

cause". Swilling has since used the concept as a comprehensive label for the multiple interconnected crises facing the global political economy, including climate change, rising inequality and the threat of financial crises.

The concept 'global polycrisis' has become very useful in comprehending the inter-connected crises of the modern world. In 2008, the entire world economy was exposed to a financial crisis and great recession. It was followed by a global pandemic- COVID-19. Now the world is threatened by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war with its impact on all walks of social life globally.

III. Global Polycrisis Today: An Analysis

We analyze the present crisis-scenario of the world under environmental, social, economic and technological heads.

a) Environmental

The idea of 'Space Ship Earth' of the famous economist K.E. Boulding may be useful in analyzing the current environmental catastrophe. The earth in space is like a ship in the ocean. So far, life is found only in this earth because life facilitating factors are present only here. But unholy human intervention is threatening the sustenance of these factors.

Let us start with 'ozone', Ozone tames solar radiation. But the CFCs emitted by human actions are damaging the ozone

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Dr. V. Mathew Kurian is the Joint Director of Dr. K. N. Raj Centre of Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala

layer, causing global warming and climatic change. This has terrific impact on sustainable social and economic life in this earth. The biological system in the earth has been maintained through a natural balancing system. For example, animals breathe oxygen while plants require carbon dioxide. We can find a mutuality between these two forms of life. But brutal deforestation is damaging this natural balancing mechanism. Similarly, water resource in this earth is maintained through natural rainfall. But various types of human intervention are distorting nature's spontaneous working. Bio-diversity is also at peril. Zoonotic diseases caused by virus and bacteria are haunting us.

b) Social and Political

In spite of scientific

developments, human society is still grappling with such irrational institutions like racism and casteism. In many parts of the world, we find accentuating social inequality and injustice. Even in developed countries like the USA we find racial oppression. Caste divisions are haunting Indian society. Swelling refugees and asylum seekers are posing a grave situation to the modern world. According to a latest UN Report, in 2022 there were eleven crore refugees in the world.

'Democracy', as a preferred political system, is getting weakened in all parts of the world. We have terrific examples like Afghanistan and Syria. States, in general, are failing to protect the life and the rights of its citizens. Wars and terrorists are threatening our lives. Nuclear threats are haunting us making our life, miserable.

c) Economic and Financial

The world economy is under the grip of 'stagflation'. Inequality is mounting. The UNDP's Human Development Index has fallen for the past two years in a row and back to 2016 levels. More than 345 million people face higher levels of food insecurity, more than double the number in 2020. About sixty percent of Less Developed Countries are in, or near, debt distress. Inflating 'dirty money' and 'money laundering' make the present world economy unethical.

d) Technological

The whole world is now exposed to uncontrolled technologies like Artificial Intelligence, bio-tech, nano-tech, robotics and cyber threats. Democracy is being victimized by the so-called Big Data. Modern technology is also making a bay to our privacy and human rights. Modification of human germline may distort the very nature of humanity in the future.

The above discussion may be summed up in a single concept 'polycrisis'. The grave challenge of the entire humanity is how to overcome this predicament. The only answer is reforming the present multilateral system.

IV. Reforming Multilateralism

The present multilateral system especially, the UNO and its allied institutions, started forming, towards the close of the Second World War. The then dominant countries particularly the USA played a significant role in constructing the post-war multilateral system. Though the UNO has 194 member countries representing in the General Assembly, the basic decisions are taken in the Security Council and the permanent members are privileged with 'Veto power'. This should go. So, the UNO should be reformed as a true democratic institution. It is really shameful to present the UNO to witness the ongoing Russia- Ukraine war for more than 500 days.

Similarly, the present global multilateral system is founded in the International Monetary Conference which was held in 1944 at Bretton woods, New Hampshire of the USA. The IMF and the World Bank, as multilateral financial institutions, were formed in that monetary conference. But the rules were largely dictated by the U.S. The system of 'weighted voting' was to cater to their interests. These institutions are now, worn out. Again, timely reforms are essential.

V. Conclusion

In this article, we analyzed the present polycrisis scenario of the world. We also advocated a truly reformed multilateralism based on values like equality, fraternity, justice and sustenance. If we fail in it, we may be doing great harm not only to the present generation but also to the coming, future generations. Better late than never!

The concept 'global polycrisis' has become very useful in comprehending the inter-connected crises of the modern world. In 2008, the entire world economy was exposed to a financial crisis and great recession. It was followed by a global pandemic- COVID-19. Now the world is threatened by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war with its impact on all walks of social life globally.



Do
RIGHT
things;
BRIGHTness
follows



World Council
of Churches

At a memorial service in Nairobi, tributes pour in for the late Dr. Agnes Abuom

>>> *Contd. from Page 1 Col. 1*

Abuom, 73, died of acute heart failure on 31 May at the Coptic Hospital in Nairobi. She had been braving a heart ailment since 2012 which worsened in September 2020.

Kenyan Anglican Archbishop Jackson Ole Sapit presided over the memorial service. Inside the church, several candles were lit to symbolize the light that Abuom was for the Kenyan, African, and the global church.

"She has been the light even in dark places. We are celebrating the life of one who has left a mark, because her light has not dimmed. She has left behind a legacy," said Sapit. "In the church, she was a teacher, a mentor, and an evangelist. She had shown a direction to many who did not know where to go."

Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, a former WCC general secretary, told that Abuom's departure was a huge loss for immediate family, friends, and many organizations whose lives she touched through services, friendship, fellowship, and solidarity."

Although we are mourning, we are also celebrating the life of an ecumenical icon," said Kobia.



Memorial service celebrating the life of Canon Dr Agnes Regina Murei Abuom at the Anglican All Saints' Cathedral in Nairobi, Kenya, on 13 June 2023. Photo: The Anglican Church of Kenya.

A lay Canon, Abuom is the immediate former moderator of the WCC central committee. She was elected to the post in 2013 at the WCC 10th Assembly in the Korean City of Busan. The first African and woman to hold the position, her term concluded in September 2022, at the

WCC 11th Assembly in the German city of Karlsruhe."

Dr Agnes sought to live her ecumenical commitment through a lifetime of dedicated service. We at the World Council of Churches, in particular, have so

benefited at every level from her decades of ecumenical engagement," Rev. Dr Jerry Pillay, WCC general secretary, told the service, as he also conveyed the condolences of member churches and ecumenical partners.

Pillay said, "The death of Abuom—peace pilgrim first to last, a true African, and also a citizen of the world—had brought home how vital her life and work had been in the ecumenical movement. Agnes showed us how Christian engagement, marked by love, can yield global, transformational change," he said.

Most Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, presiding bishop of the Church of Sweden and a former WCC general secretary, said, "As an African church leader, Abuom had brought the spirituality and strength of churches to the global fellowship."

"As a disciple of Jesus Christ and a pilgrim in the world, she became the most credible witness of the love of God, and represented in a special way the presence of the Kingdom of God among us," said Tveit in a tribute.

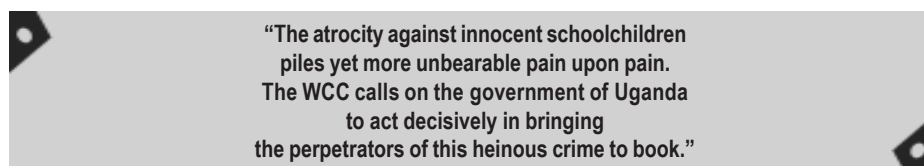
Dr. Abuom was buried on 15 June at her home in Kapseret Tanning Village, near Eldoret town, Gishu County.

WCC condemns Uganda school attack

World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay expressed shock at the news of a brutal attack at a school in western Uganda by rebels linked to the Islamic State Group, on 16 June.

Nearly 40 pupils have been killed at a school in western Uganda when five militants attacked the Lhubirha secondary school in Mpondwe at around 23:30 (20:30 GMT) on 16 June.

They entered dormitories, setting fire



and using machetes to kill and maim the pupils.

The attack on the school, located less than 2km (1.25 miles) from Congolese border, is the first such attack on a Ugandan school in 25 years.

"The WCC joins with the churches and all people of good will in Uganda and around the world in condemning this abhorrent act, in commiserating with the families and communities affected, and in praying for the healing of the wounded

children and families," said Pillay.

"The suffering of the people of the western regions of Uganda has gone beyond the limits of understanding", Pillay continued. "This atrocity against innocent schoolchildren piles yet more unbearable pain upon pain. The WCC calls on the government of Uganda to act decisively in bringing the perpetrators of this heinous crime to book."

— WCC News



World Communion
of Reformed Churches

GRAPE campaigns come into focus

Address the enormity and complexity of the unjust economic situation

>>> *Contd. from Page 1 Col. 4*

each person in Kenya is guaranteed 50 litres of clean and safe drinking water or equivalent cash compensation. Since Kenya is not responsible for the climate breakdown, there is a case to be made for the country to receive financial support from global climate justice, adaptation, and mitigation programmes which can support the achievement of this goal.

In South Africa, given the extreme income inequality, prevailing poverty, and unemployment, the team wants to join forces with the national campaign for the introduction of a universal basic income grant (UBIG) of at least R663 per person monthly to all individuals between the ages of 18 and 59 by 2028. Already during the meeting in Johannesburg, two active actors in the campaign, the Economic Justice Institute (EJI)

and the "PayTheGrant," gave presentations and input into the concept and campaign in South Africa. The networking with other actors, so vital for advocacy campaigns, started already then and there.

The steering committee members and church leaders, together with the GRAPE team members and EPRI, then mapped out the way forward on how the churches can take

concrete steps to engage in these advocacy campaigns; this included planning a timeline for informing their relevant structures, translating information material for congregations into local languages, and strategizing for public events. The next months will further set the stage for the churches to become owners and agents of the advocacy campaigns.

GRAPE is a WCRC project that seeks to address the enormity and complexity of the unjust economic situation coupled with the climate crisis by growing networks of advocates in church and civil society. It is made possible with support from *Brot für die Welt* and *Otto per Mille*.

— WCRC News

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Mammen Varkey

"But the angel said to the women, "He is not here; for he has risen, as he said. ... Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you shall see him. Lo, I have told you." And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Hail!" Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." Matthew 28: 5 – 10. (RSV)

It must have been with terrible reluctance, the eleven disciples, according to Matthew, went to Galilee as told by the Risen Lord. Even after going over to Galilee, and meeting the Risen Master, some of them had doubts and were not convinced fully about the appearance and mission of their Risen Master. Matthew writes, "And when they saw him they worshipped him; but some doubted." Matt. 28: 16

John had completed writing the Gospel

The 'doubt' of some of the chosen twelve, undoubtedly, is deeply disturbing. But what John writes, in the Gospel according to him, is shocking. Why that shocking narrative was written by John, and included in the Gospel he wrote, should be noted well. By the twentieth chapter John had completed writing the Gospel. "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the

disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." John 20: 30,31 (RSV). So with these verses, John had completed writing the Gospel. As per 'Peake's Commentary on the Bible', "It can scarcely be doubted that 30f is the end of the Gospel as originally planned..... The Gospel comes to a close with the statement of its purpose in 20: 30f. Who added Ch. 21 and why? It is evident that the Gospel was never published without its last chapter, and this fact, together with its stylistic resemblance to the rest of the Gospel, suggest that it was a supplement added by the evangelist himself." Page 867 (Edition 1977). **So Chapter 21 is a post-script.**

The book was re-opened and one more chapter was added to it

There must have been sufficient reasons for John to re-open the book that he had completed writing, and closed, and to write and add one more chapter to it. What is described

in the 21st Chapter, therefore, should be unfailingly noticed. **In fact, the chapter 21 tells us some shocking and saddening, but at the same time supremely important, lessons, in our following of the Risen Lord, in our discipleship and spiritual journey.**

Some of these reflections have been shared in this series 'Along with Him'. But for the completeness of the present series of reflections on Jesus' Resurrection, his final encounters with his chosen disciples, his messages and commands, which under no circumstances should be forgotten, are being shared here, again.

"I am going fishing"

Some of the disciples had wanted to stay back in Jerusalem, to witness the establishment of the 'kingdom' by the Risen Lord and be part of it. In fact, two of them, James and John, the sons of Zebedee had gone to the Master and openly asked for seats, one on the right and the other on the left, **when he would come in glory.** Mark 10: 35-45. **Now that the Lord had**

risen and appeared in glory, they hoped that he would establish the Kingdom centred around Jerusalem, and they would get seats on his right and on his left. But nothing of that sort happened. Besides the Lord himself asked them to go back to Galilee. It was with indescribable reluctance, the eleven went to Galilee! But there too, nothing of that type, that is the establishment of the Kingdom with the throne and seats on the right and the left, seemed to be taking place. **So some of the disciples were totally frustrated. And they thought that there was no meaning in 'being with' even the Risen Master. They had been selected to become 'fishers of men'. Mark 1: 17.**

They thought that there was no meaning in holding on to the dreams of 'fishers' and 'rulers' of men. So they decided to go back to their earlier way of life, to be fishers. None else than Simon Peter said to his colleagues "I am going fishing". They said to them, "We will go with you. They went out and got into the boat...." John 21: 3 !

LAMP UNTO THE FEET, LIGHT UNTO THE PATH

The Influence Of Thoughts

A. V. Itty

Phil. 4:4-9

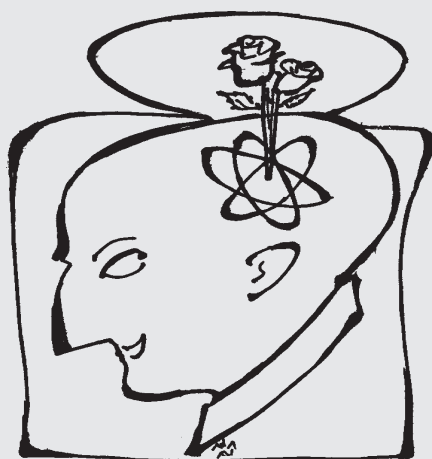
"In conclusion, my brothers, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise; things that are true, noble, pure, lovely, and honourable." (v.8)

A person's thoughts influence the formation of his/her character.

"We are the products of what we think".

We often do not think with an intention to develop our character. Yet, what we think does influence our character! Human beings cannot live without thinking about anything or without being influenced by anything. Even if we say, "I am not thinking about anything or I am not concerned about anything", we might be thinking about something or might be concerned about something! Tomorrow, we become the products of the thoughts that rule us today!

In the Scripture portion we are meditating upon, St. Paul tells us what should be themes of our thoughts. It is when we think of things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honourable, as the Apostle points out, we reconcile our thoughts and desires with Godly thoughts and ideas and the will of God! The Apostle says the



same thing when he exhorts the Colossian believers: "You have been raised to life with Christ; so set your hearts on the things that are in heaven, where Christ sits on His throne at the right-hand side of God. Keep your minds fixed on things there, not on things here on the earth". (Col. 3:1,2).

The same idea is reflected in the counsel: "Hitch your wagons to the stars". If our thoughts are related only to this



Prof. A. V. Itty, former Professor of English at Bishop Moore College, Mavelikara, is, now, engaged in the Evangelical, and Educational Ministry undertaken by ADORE in the Rayagada Dist. of Odisha. 94950 17850 (Mob)

world, we shall merely be this worldly. But, if we think and reflect on heavenly things we shall become divine.

Let us try to make our thoughts and interests divine/ May God help us.

Food For Thought:

Tomorrow, we will be the products of our thoughts of today!



**CLOSE
your
CLAWS;
you never
LOSE
your
CLASS!**

Kairali Life-Time Achievement Award 2021 in Social Science Research to Dr. M. A. Oommen



Higher Education Minister R. Bindu presenting the Kairali Lifetime Achievement Prize for Researchers (Social Science) to Dr. M.A. Oommen. L to R: Ms. Vanaja P.S., Dr. Rajan Varughese, Dr. Rajan Gurukkal, Ms. R. Bindu, Dr. M. A. Oommen and Dr. A. Ajayaghosh.

The Kairali Life-Time Achievement Award 2021, instituted by the State Government of Kerala, for researchers in the area of Social Science, was awarded to the internationally renowned economist, Dr. M. A. Oommen. The award was presented to Dr. Oommen by the Higher Education Minister Ms. R. Bindu, at Trivandrum on 8 June 2023.

Writer-literary critic M. Leelavathi, scientist Dr. A. Ajayaghosh and Medical Doctor Salim Yusuf were awarded the Kairali Lifetime Achievement Prizes for Researchers in Arts and Humanities, Science and Medical Science respectively.

The Kairali Research Awards for members of the University and College Faculties, who have excelled in research in cutting-edge areas were presented to Dr. Shamshad Hussain K.T., Dr. Reenamole G., Dr. Radhakrishnan E., Dr. Alex P. James, and Dr. Anver Sadath. The Kairali Research Prizes for students, involved in innovative research, were given to Dr. Manju K., Dr. Mayuri P.V., Dr. Sijila Rosely C.V., and Dr. Swapna M.S.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Bindu said that the higher education institutions would incorporate a student-centric curriculum from the next academic year onwards. The reformed teaching and learning process would provide greater freedom for students to choose subjects of their liking. "Such steps were expected to rejuvenate the higher education sector", she added.

Speaking on the occasion Dr. M. A. Oommen said, "The Universities and Colleges should become platforms for deep, critical intellectual discussions and debates. But these are, generally, missing now in India".

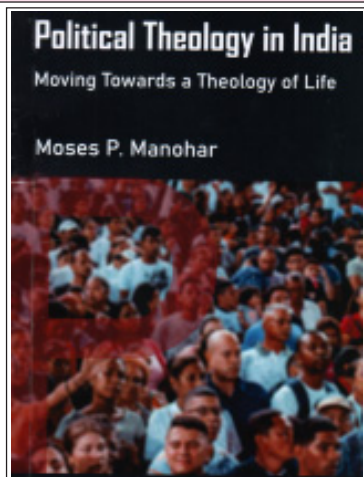
The Kerala State Higher Education Council Vice Chairman Dr. Rajan Gurukkal presided over the programme. The Secretary of the Higher Education Council Dr. Rajan Varughese and Registrar Ms. Vanaja P.S. also spoke on the occasion.

Political Theology in India Moving Towards a Theology of Life

Author: Dr. Moses P. Manohar

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Political Theology in India - Moving Towards a Theology of Life:

"Politics in India needs a citizen-friendly interpretation. Theology has to clarify that politics is about life. Political theology in India must approach politics as a contract for life, liberty and property for all. It affirms love as the substance, sufficient to transform the society. I trust, this book will give a useful framework for further theological engagement with politics."

The author Dr. Moses P. Manohar is an ecumenical leader and a theologian. Most of his contributions have been in the areas of human rights, social justice and constitutional studies. He serves as the Executive Director of Inter-Church Service Association (ICSA), Chennai

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CHEER CHAT

A day without laughter
is a day wasted.

– Nicolas Chamfort



Christian Conference of Asia

Asia Sunday–2023 will focus on the CCA Assembly theme, 'God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation'

"The theme of the forthcoming CCA Assembly features the theological significance of 'creation' for the first time in the history of the CCA Assemblies.

The theme acknowledges the theological emphasis of creation more comprehensively and considers how affirming the truth of God's creation affects human beings created in the image of God, who are the culmination of God's creation."

Dr. Mathews George Chunakara, CCA General Secretary.



Asia Sunday–2023 will be observed on 17 September 2023 and the theme will be the same as that of the 15th General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), 'God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation'.

The 15th CCA General Assembly will be held from 27 September to 4 October 2023 in Kottayam, India.

CCA member churches and councils are requested to observe Asia Sunday on 17 September 2023, a week before the 15th CCA General Assembly begins.

Asia Sunday is usually observed every year on the Sunday before Pentecost, but this year's Asia Sunday observance will be in conjunction with the CCA General Assembly, offering CCA member churches and councils the opportunity to reflect upon the Assembly theme and pray for the forthcoming Asian ecumenical event.

The General Secretary of the CCA, Dr. Mathews George

Chunakara, stated, "The Asia Sunday–2023 beckons the CCA member constituencies to reflect on their participation in the God's work of reconciliation, renewal, restoration, and transformation of the entire creation."

"The theme of the forthcoming CCA Assembly features the theological significance of 'creation' for the first time in the history of the CCA Assemblies. The theme acknowledges the theological emphasis of creation more comprehensively and considers how affirming the truth of God's creation affects human beings created in the image of God, who are the culmination of God's creation", added the CCA General Secretary.

The CCA urges its member churches and councils to dedicate and observe 17 September 2023 as Asia Sunday–2023 and use the special Asia Sunday liturgy and prayers, which will be shared soon.

– CCA News

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